

THE RAVEN

BY EDGAR ALLAN POE



THE RAVEN - SETTING

The chamber of a house at midnight.
Poe uses the word *chamber* rather than *bedroom* apparently because *chamber* has a dark and mysterious connotation.



THE RAVEN - NARRATION

First-Person Narrator (Persona)

A man who has lost his beloved, a woman named Lenore. He is depressed, lonely, and possibly mentally unstable as a result of his bereavement.



THE RAVEN - SOURCE OF INSPIRATION

The raven in Charles Dickens' 1841 novel, *Barnaby Rudge*, a historical novel about anti-Catholic riots in London in 1780 in which a mentally retarded person (Barnaby) is falsely accused of participating. Barnaby owns a pet raven, Grip, which can speak. In the fifth chapter of the novel, Grip taps at a shutter (as in Poe's poem).



The model for Grip was Dickens' own talking raven, which was the delight of his children. It was the first of three ravens owned by Dickens, all named Grip. After the first Grip died, it was stuffed and mounted. An admirer of Poe's works acquired and mounted the bird and donated it to the Free Library of Philadelphia, where it is on display today.



THE RAVEN - A GLORIFIED CROW

A raven, which can be up to two feet long, is a type of crow. Ravens eat small animals, carrion, fruit, and seeds. They often appear in legend and literature as sinister omens.



THE RAVEN - THEME

Theme: The death of a beautiful woman, as lamented by her bereaved lover.



THE RAVEN - WORD CHOICE

As in his short stories, Poe is careful to use primarily words that contribute to the overall atmosphere and tone of the poem. These words include *weary, dreary, bleak, dying, sorrow, sad, darkness, stillness, mystery, ebony, grave, stern, lonely, grim, ghastly, and gaunt.*



THE RAVEN - SOUND AND RHYTHM

The melancholy tone of "The Raven" relies as much on its musical sound and rhythmic pattern as on the meaning of the words. To achieve his musical effect, Poe uses rhyming words in the same line (internal rhyme), a word at the end of one line that rhymes with a word at the end of another line (end rhyme), alliteration (a figure of speech that repeats a consonant sound), and a regular pattern of accented and unaccented syllables. This pattern uses a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable, with a total of sixteen syllables in each line.



Here is an example (the first line of the poem):

.....ONCE u PON a MID night DREAR y, WHILE i POND ered
WEAK and WEAR y

In this line, the capitalized letters represent the stressed syllables and the lower-cased letters, the unstressed ones. Notice that the line has sixteen syllables in all.

Notice, too, that the line has internal rhyme (*dreary* and *weary*) and alliteration (while, wweak, wweary).



THE RAVEN - WHO IS LENORE?

It is possible that Lenore, the idealized deceased woman in the poem, represents Poe's beloved wife, Virginia, who was in poor health when Poe wrote "The Raven." She died two years after the publication of the poem, when she was only in her mid-twenties.



THE RAVEN - CRITICISM

Some reviewers in Poe's day, including poet Walt Whitman, criticized "The Raven" for its sing-song, highly emotional quality. The poem is still criticized today—and often parodied—for the same reason. However, the consensus of critics and ordinary readers appears to be that the poem is a meticulously crafted work of genius and fully deserves its standing as one of the most popular poems in American literature. It is indeed a great work.



THE RAVEN - SUMMARY

It is midnight on a cold evening in December in the 1840s. In a dark and shadowy bedroom, wood burns in the fireplace as a man laments the death of Lenore, a woman he deeply loved. To occupy his mind, he reads a book of ancient stories. But a tapping noise disturbs him. When he opens the door to the bedroom, he sees nothing—only darkness.



THE RAVEN - SUMMARY

When the tapping persists, he opens the shutter of the window and discovers a raven, which flies into the room and lands above the door on a bust of Athena (Pallas in the poem), the goddess of wisdom and war in Greek mythology. It says “Nevermore” to all his thoughts and longings. The raven, a symbol of death, tells the man he will never again (“nevermore”) see his beloved, never again hold her—even in heaven.

